



Representatives
Velma Veloria
& Eileen Cody

11th DISTRICT UPDATE



Rep. Velma Veloria



Rep. Eileen Cody

Dear neighbors:

The 1997 Legislature has completed its 105-day session and it's good to be home. Here's an update of the work produced during the 55th legislative session.

Since we are health care providers, we understand the growing need for affordable health care. As the Ranking Minority on the Health Care Committee, Rep. Cody worked with the Governor to stop efforts which would have seriously impacted individual access to health care insurance. We worked hard to protect funding for the Basic Health Plan and would have liked to have seen it expanded further.

Two local projects that we supported received funding. The Seattle Log House Museum, envisioned by the Southwest Seattle Historical Society, received \$190,000 in this year's capital budget. The Wing Luke Asian Museum received \$100,000 for future development of a new museum site. However, we believe there were missed opportunities in education, transportation improvement, civil rights, labor, trade and economic development.

With Washington's economy still strong, the state was in the enviable position of having more money coming in than it could spend under the restrictions of Initiative 601. We would have liked to have seen more of this money saved for the days when our economy might not be as strong. This session, we made tax cuts of \$414 million for the next biennium. The largest cut benefits service-related businesses through a B&O tax cut, effective July 1, 1998.

In the interests of efficient government, we supported Governor Locke's directive that all state agencies trim budgets by 5%, so that more funds could be diverted to education. We believe that the state ought to live up to its Constitutional mandate to fully fund basic education as its first priority.

It is an honor to serve as your 11th District representatives.

Eileen Cody
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11th District

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Health Care

Health care -- its costs, its access and its quality -- are very much on the minds of residents of the 11th District. As Ranking Minority Member of the Health Care Committee, Rep. Cody strove to advance health care protections for citizens.

Almost 600,000 people are completely uninsured in this state. At least 90,000 of those are on a waiting list for the Basic Health Plan (BHP), a list that grows at 4,000 to 5,000 a week. In our 11th District, more than 4,000 people are on the waiting list for the BHP.

Affordable access to health insurance for low-income working families remains an unfulfilled promise by majority lawmakers. But as bad as the situation is, it could have been worse.

This last session, majority lawmakers came close to eliminating the Basic Health Plan. They wanted to increase premiums to prohibitive levels. Premium payments would have nearly tripled for someone at the federal poverty level. They also wanted to eliminate coverage for mental-health treatment and organ transplants. Furthermore, they would have allowed for no new enrollments in the BHP.

My Democratic colleagues, including Governor Locke, were able to moderate the Republican budget proposal. Premiums, although increased, did not skyrocket for the Basic Health Plan. About 8,000 more people were added. While that's not ideal, it is better than the first budget proposed and we have hopes that in the years to come we will make further progress.

On other health-related matters, few issues sparked more criticism this year than attempts to deregulate the health care insurance industry. The Individual Market Stabilization Bill promised more freedom for the health care industry. However, we were wary about the bill's potential to guarantee rate increases and impede access to affordable health care insurance for working families.

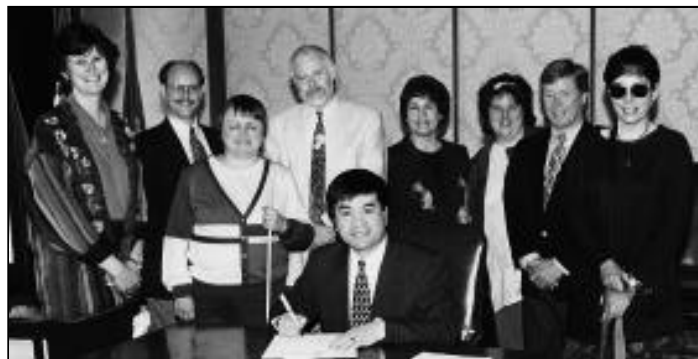
That bill would have undercut the ability of the Insurance Commissioner to protect consumers against rate increases. It would have made it more difficult to get insurance by allowing consumers to sign up only once a year. It would have allowed insurance companies to discontinue or modify policies at any time without seeking agreement from the enrollee or approval from the insurance company. Fortunately, the bill's harmful provisions were stopped by the Governor's veto pen.

Dog Guides and Service Animals

Governor Locke signed into law SHB 1491, which ensures disabled individuals the civil right to be accompanied by a service animal. Rep. Cody was the prime sponsor on the bill, receiving support from three organizations within the 11th District that advocate for and educate service animals (North-

west Aide Dog Foundation, PAWS Abilities Dog Training Center, and Delta Society National Service Dog Center).

Washington's "White Cane Law" had provided protection and regulation of guide and service animals since 1969, but our state laws needed updating. Passage of this legislation brings Washington's laws in compliance with new federal ADA regulations and places enforcement of the law under the Washington State Civil Rights Commission.



Gov. Locke signs SHB 1491 into law. (L to R): Rep. Eileen Cody, Martin Casey, Sue Ammeter, Toby Olson, Gov. Gary Locke, Margaret Germaine, Janice Skinner, Dave Knutson, and Mary Rook.

Trade

As Ranking Minority of the Trade & Economic Development Committee, Rep. Veloria worked to maintain Washington's high trade profile.

There was a bipartisan approach to many trade and economic development issues at the committee level. However, the majority party in both houses allowed very little of this legislation to pass the Legislature to become law. HB 1256 would have provided B&O tax credits to employers for state-approved, employer-provided basic skills training for employees. It was supported by the Duwamish Coalition, but failed to clear the House Finance Committee.

HB 1495, sponsored by Rep. Veloria would have provided technical assistance to Alternative Trade Organizations (ATOs) in Washington state. ATOs are non-profit organizations which link retailers/buyers in developed countries with farmers, artisans and producers in poor countries abroad, in an effort to encourage good labor practices and reduce labor exploitation. Washington's proposal, the first in the nation, received a favorable introduction but did not pass into law this session.

One major action during the session was the passage of ESHB 2192, which authorized a public vote on a new stadium for the Seahawks. We worked with the community and our colleagues from the 37th District to ensure that the legislation included provision of \$10 million to mitigate construction impact on nearby areas and it also provided a mechanism to

include women and minority contractors in the bid process to construct the stadium.

Juvenile Justice

The Legislature passed landmark legislation reforming juvenile justice laws, an effort initiated by Democrats. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1997 enhances public safety and emphasizes early intervention for delinquent youth.

The bill offers the first comprehensive reform of Washington's juvenile justice laws in 20 years. We sought a realistic approach to juvenile crime that would deter future problems, not just send a "get tough" message.

The bill creates greater accountability for youthful offenders. It sets up a new, simplified sentencing grid. The bill is not just punitive. It emphasizes drug and alcohol services. It's estimated that in many communities as many as 80 percent of juveniles who come before court have serious drug and alcohol problems. The bill encourages parents to become more involved in the court process. It provides community-based programs that emphasize youth accountability, including a volunteer mentoring program pilot project.

*Rep. Velma Veloria
with students
from Our Lady of
Guadalupe School*



K-12 Education

Education continues to be the state's number one priority. The state will spend more money on education next year, but inflation and other variables will more than offset gains. When a 2.4% inflation rate is factored in, Washington is actually spending less per student. Statewide, per-pupil spending will actually go down \$70 next year, when adjusted for inflation.

The bottom line is that urban schoolchildren will have less dollars and more crowded classrooms at the same time that higher academic standards are expected to be met.

Democratic lawmakers and the Governor were successful in defending education against deeper cuts. Complex needs funding was kept at its current level. Half of the proposed cuts to magnet schools were restored. Successful community pressure led to the Governor's veto of legislation that would have loosened bilingual education requirements.

Higher Education

Governor Locke often cites education, including higher education, as "the great equalizer." Following this emphasis, the Legislature agreed to:

- Boost college enrollment by 6,400 students in preparation for the baby boom "echo" which will bring 84,000 more college applicants in the next 15 years

- Increase student financial aid by \$30 million
- Implement a prepaid college tuition program, enabling parents to pay for a future college education at today's prices
- Approve \$546 million for higher education construction projects, including improved branch campuses
- Approve a 3% salary raise for teachers and college professors
- Approve a special \$4 million fund to recruit and retain faculty

On the other hand, the majority party cut workforce training at community and technical colleges, including training for former workers impacted by the depressed timber and fishing industries. Those cuts will hurt 4,000 workers in need of re-training.

Taxes

The 1997 legislature missed an opportunity for meaningful property tax relief to working families. Property taxes have been rising across the country as assessed values escalate. Washington ranks 21st in the country for its amount of state and local property tax. In 1996, the Legislature granted homeowners a one-time cut of 4.7% in the state portion of the property tax. That resulted in homeowners getting roughly \$17 in reduced taxes.

This year, Democrats argued for a deeper cut to homeowners, pointing out that businesses have been the primary beneficiary of tax cuts in the last two years (92% of tax cuts of \$1 billion). If the Democratic proposal would have become law, homeowners would have received a tax cut of \$205. On the other hand, majority lawmakers argued for a continuation of the 1996 4.7% across the board cut for both homeowners and businesses.

With both sides unable to come to agreement, Governor Locke asked lawmakers to approve a one-year extension of

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the 4.7% state property tax cut, pending further legislative discussions for 1998 tax relief. Lawmakers did not reach a consensus and you, the voters, will ultimately decide whether the 4.7% state property tax cut should be permanent.

Another tax relief measure was ESSB 5286, which exempted businesses from paying taxes on "intangible property" such as goodwill, reputation, patents and copyrights. Proponents argued that the value of "intangible property" is difficult to ascertain. Opponents argued that businesses would be under-taxed if assessors were not able to figure "intangible property" into property values.

With the passage of ESSB 5286, businesses will not be separately taxed on the value of "intangible property." According to the King County Assessor, this legislation may cost individual homeowners an additional \$100 each year, as local governments attempt to make up lost revenue.

Labor

In 1997, House and Senate Democrats worked to increase wages, improve job safety and expand job training. Both of your representatives co-sponsored a raise in the minimum wage to \$6.50 (Washington's minimum wage is now the lowest on the West Coast). But those in control did not feel this issue even warranted a hearing.

Two recent State Supreme Court decisions provided that workers can sue employers who knowingly injure the safety of their workers. However, the House came close to passing legislation to reverse these Supreme Court decisions. Fortunately, House Democrats and a few moderate Republicans were able to defeat this legislation.

We fought against efforts to weaken child labor laws. Legislation which would have allowed employers to work high school students up to 36 hours a week did not pass.

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UPDATE

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